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Benjamin Ferris

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PAPERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE.
XXXVII.

BENJAMIN FERRIS.

Proceedings of the meeting of the Historical Society of Delaware, held on the evening of May 19, 1902, to commemorate the eminent services rendered to the State by Benjamin Ferris the author of "Early Settlements on the Delaware."

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE,
WILMINGTON.
1903.



BENJAMIN FERRIS,
FROM A DAGUERREOTYPE IN THE POSSESSION OF THE FAMILY.

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THE JOHN M. ROGERS PRESS, WILMINGTON, DEL.

EXPLANATION.

The committee on Literary Exercises in conjunction with the librarian conceived the idea of setting apart an evening to be devoted to papers and reminiscences touching the life, work and character of Benjamin Ferris, the author of the historical publication known as "The Early Settlements on the Delaware." This publication was issued in 1845 and represented years of patient and painstaking work on the part of the author, and while the work itself has been everywhere recognized as one of distinguished merit, but little has been hitherto presented in permanent shape that tended to impress upon the public the worth and stable character of the man through whose research and effort so much of local historical value has been preserved, that would otherwise have been lost.—The meeting proved an interesting one and was attended by many of the older citizens who had known Benjamin Ferris in his lifetime. The contents of the pages following, containing as they do the proceedings of the meeting, constitute, in some measure, a just meed of praise to the worthy author and historian whom all felt a delight in honoring.

THE LIBRARIAN.

MEMOIR OF BENJAMIN FERRIS.

Prepared by Lewis P. Bush, M. D., an old and intimate friend of the subject of the sketch, and read by Dr. Bush before a meeting of the Historical Society held on the evening of March 10, 1870. Re-read by Henry C. Conrad, Librarian of the Society at the commemorative exercises.

Benjamin Ferris, the subject of the following notice died in Wilmington, Del., November 9th, A. D. 1867.

He was a descendent from an English Family, one of whose members, Samuel Ferris, came from Reading, England, about 40 miles N. E. of London, in the year 1682, and settled at Groton, near Boston, Mass., but shortly afterward removed to Charlestown, Mass., and thence to New Milford, Conn. From this place his Grandson, John Ferris removed and settled in Wilmington, Del., in the year 1748; thus being among the first settlers in this city.

Ziba Ferris, the son of John Ferris, was born in New Milford, A. D. 1743, and died in Wilmington, A. D. 1794. He was the father of Benjamin Ferris, of whom is this paper.—It seemed proper that some notice, other than the ordinary Resolutions of respect which have been passed by this Society, should be taken of the subject of this paper, who was a respected member of the Society, and also the first citizen of our State, who ever attempted to gather up any portion of its annals, and hence this sketch.

Of his ancestors, Benjamin Ferris remarks as follows—
“They are spoken of in the early family records, as being

"of the Puritan sort of people, and for several generations continued to profess the Presbyterian form of faith."

With many others of a like faith, this family, doubtless impressed by the uncertainty of repose in England, in view of the great troubles and sufferings in regard to religion, which had extended through more than a century, hailed the opening of a new country, as light from Heaven, and emigrated to America in hope of finding the peace here, which was denied them in their own land. They had lived near the center of those agitations which prevailed during the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth, of James and Charles 1st and 2nd; and up to the time of their leaving England the peace of the country seemed as unstable as the waves of the ocean. I here quote, as an interesting and instructive fragment, the following remarks of Benjamin Ferris, recorded by him in a book of family history, as a tribute to the character of his ancestors—"One of the best inducements," says he "to stimulate survivors to preserve a record of the character of those who have gone before them, is the hope that the example of worthy ancestors may excite their descendants to follow in their footsteps. On looking over the annals of those, who have passed through the scene of probation before me, on both the paternal and maternal sides of my family, I find an ancestry, pure and spotless as regards any stain on their moral character. I have no doubt that they all had the same temptations, and the same trials that await us, and will always attend those who succeed us; but standing on the watch tower, and having timely notice of the approach of their enemies, they were enabled to conquer; or being suddenly attacked, were, thro' Divine Mercy,

aided in the conflict, and came out victorious; leaving us an example that we might follow their steps."

Benjamin Ferris was born in Wilmington, August 7th, 1780. His early life was spent in Philadelphia where he obtained a knowledge of the watchmaking business; and whence he returned to Wilmington in the year 1813. During nearly the whole period between that and his death, he resided in this city. His occupation here was that of a conveyancer, and he was also appointed city surveyor about the year 1820, which office he discharged with so much public satisfaction, that it was with difficulty that he could disengage himself from it. Fond of knowledge, he read extensively upon religious and historical subjects, especially the history of our own country; and having an excellent memory, he laid up extensive stores of facts relative to general and personal subjects, which, with his fondness for social intercourse, rendered his companionship most interesting and instructive to his friends.

Among other subjects to which his attention was naturally directed, as a member of the Society of Friends, and especially interested in the life, character and administration of William Penn, was that of the condition and welfare of the aborigines of our Country; and hence in November, 1839, we find his name on a committee appointed by the yearly meetings of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, to investigate and lay before Congress and the President of the United States the history and wrongs of the Seneca Indians.

These Indians who occupied a Reservation of land chiefly in the southern part of New York, had become surrounded by an advancing civilization. An agricultural

community occupied all the land adjacent, and as the property of the Indians containing over 100,000 acres, was growing in value, it became an object of cupidity to the Ogden Land Company, who resolved to secure it, (whether by right or by wrong). This Company had by a grant from the State of Massachusetts, the original proprietor of that part of New York, obtained the pre-emption right to the land occupied by the Senecas, which implied the right of the first opportunity of purchase, whenever the Indians should remove; and at the time of which we now speak, were endeavouring by very unjust means to dispossess the Indians. It became evident to the Society of Friends that this Company was likely to effect their object, which would necessitate the removal of the Senecas to some remote part of the Country; and to prevent such removal against the wishes of the Indians, was the object of the appointment of this Committee. To accomplish their unrighteous purpose the Company had by bribes induced a number of the Chiefs of the Nation to sign a treaty assenting to their removal; but the Committee had fully ascertained and proved the iniquity of the procedure, and had thus represented it to the President and Senate of the United States.

The Treaty was referred by the Senate to a committee of that body, who were fully satisfied of its fraudulent character, and having remodeled it, reported it to the Senate, by whom it was sent to the Indians for their acceptance. This assent could not be obtained, as Mr. Van Buren stated in his message the next year, 1840—but taking advantage of a thin house, the friends of the Land Co. succeeded in pushing it through the Senate by a bare majority, after which, bearing the signature of the President, it was returned to

the Indians, carrying with it the sentence of banishment from the homes and graves of their fathers.

In these efforts which continued through two years. Benjamin Ferris took a prominent part, having been a member not only of the original committee, but also of all the sub-committees. After this disappointment a correspondence and conference was had with Joel R. Poinsett and John C. Spencer, Secretary of War, by Philip E. Thomas of Baltimore, which resulted in the restoration to the Indians of about one-half, or 53,000 acres of their land ; but not until some 200 of the Indians had been induced by deception to remove beyond the Mississippi. There they were overtaken by want of their usual comforts, by want of food, by disease, and the death of a considerable number of them. The remainder were brought back by the efforts of the Friends, and replaced upon the remnant of their former reservation in New York.

"To the honor of the State of New York, says "the Report," it should be recorded in *perpetuam rec memoriam*, that the aborigines of our Country, who have sought and found protection within her borders have been treated with humanity and kindness. "We believe that she is now the only state of the original thirteen that founded this Republic, in which there remains a political, organized body of native Indians. Even in the State of Pennsylvania, so much lauded for her magnanimity and justice to the natives, it is believed that there is not one foot of land now owned or occupied by an Indian. New York alone may proudly claim the honor of affording to several bands of them, resting places and security; she has moreover established schools for the education of their children, and under her fostering

protection, they have been instructed and led into the habits and comforts of civilized life, she has bountifully assisted in the support of the schools established by her, and has moreover founded and contributed, to support among them an orphan asylum, which shelters a large number of destitute children.’’ [See page 43 of Pamphlet of Documents, etc., also page 51.]

Previously to serving upon this Indian Committee, Benjamin Ferris had had his mind inclined to the subject of a history of the early settlement of his native state. His leisure, inclination and desire for employment alike conducted to the development of this idea; and his visits to New York in connection with his duties on this committee gave him an opportunity of examining the records which were deposited at Albany, and in the library of the New York Historical Society, with reference to this subject. From the Pennsylvania Historical Society he received much assistance; and among other sources of information he sought to look into the records of the Old Swedes’ church of this place by studying the Swedish language, but found great difficulties from the change of the language; which was sufficient partially to obscure the meaning.

The field over which he now resolved to travel was one without landmarks, and in a great measure unexplored, whose rich materials lay scattered widely, and in entire confusion. If he had accomplished nothing else, he would, at least, have had the satisfaction and credit of setting up the landmarks, thus inciting others to travel over, and labor upon the field, so much more practicable and easy of improvement than when he first looked upon it. But

he did more than this; for he arranged and matured a history the value of which, from its rich materials of facts and dates, so diligently sought out, and conscientiously set forth, must always hereafter be acknowledged. Campanius' small work was translated into the English language by Peter DuPonceau, the late venerable President of the Pennsylvania Historical Society, and so far as I know, this was the only work on this subject translated from the Swedish language when Mr. Ferris wrote; or at least the only printed one. The Rev. Israel Acrelius, and Rev. Andreas Rudman, had written a history of their times in Swedish, and that of the latter was in the possession of the Wicaco church. These persons were Lutheran ministers, the former was one of the ministers of our Old Swedes' Church; the latter was the first minister at Wicaco church, in the year 1700.

The period of general history passed over in the "original settlements on the Delaware" is from the year 1609, the date of Hudson's discoveries in America, to the beginning of the Eighteenth century, after William Penn had organized the government of the State of Pennsylvania, and the three counties on the Delaware. It would not be in accordance with the object of this paper to set forth even the outline of this interesting part of the work, which is in the hands of so many of our citizens.

The next division of the work is occupied with a history of the ecclesiastical affairs of the Swedes, a history which begins with, and clusters around our Old Swedes' Church; that ancient building, which challenges our veneration, as carrying back our associations so far into the past of this country, not only in fancy, but by its solemn personal presence.

The third part of the work is devoted to the history of our own city, and neighborhood—its origin, gradual growth and advancement up to the period of the publication of the book in the year 1846, when Mr. Ferris estimated our population at 7,000.

The political history of the State, as it was involved in the wars for Independence did not enter into the scope of the work which he set himself to perform; this yet remains to be gathered up, and it is to be feared that each year is destroying the materials for such a history. Since the above was written, I have received the first number of a work on the history of Delaware by Francis Vincent of this city;—which is intended to cover the ground left untouched by Mr. Ferris.

"The original settlements" was published in the year 1846, and the whole edition was so fully absorbed that it is difficult now to obtain a copy of it. About the year 1856, Benjamin Ferris was seized with a paralysis, which destroyed in a great measure his power of speech, and wholly that of reading and writing, and although he lived 11 years afterwards, his speech returned only imperfectly. But during that period he might be seen daily walking abroad with some member of his family, as active as anyone among us of his age. He thus kept himself acquainted with the progress of improvement in our city, and also with the scenes of his earlier life, as far as they remained. These changes which have taken place so rapidly within the past few years, he looked upon with a good deal of emotion, as they obliterated yearly the old places, full of associations of the history of the past, in which he had loved so much to dwell. In "the

Original Settlements," he thus beautifully expresses himself, page 172.

Much as such a lament as this may be scouted by those who are entirely engrossed with passing events, who find their only pleasure in the rapid march of population, and its attendants, no one need be ashamed of a heart which originates and gives vent to such sentiments.

"For one hundred years, says he, after the adjacent City of Wilmington was laid out, the old church stood nearly half a mile from the built part of it. Its situation secluded and quiet. The scenery all around it was indeed beautiful, but calculated rather to tranquilize the feelings than to excite them. The Christiana flowed by between its green bordering of reeds, but a few paces from the church yard walls. Many a bright sail was to be seen on a summer evening, gliding along its noiseless current. Behind it was the beautiful Brandywine, and beyond it the majestic Delaware, bounded by the blue line of Jersey Woods, and rolling its mighty waters toward the mightier Atlantic. Rich green meadows lay immediately round the church; all these, with the countless interesting associations connected with the place, combined to make a walk to the old church yard a favorite object both to the old and young.

In no spot, perhaps, on this side of the ocean, where almost everything is new and fresh, where there is so little to excite feeling of veneration, or gratify the taste of the antiquary, are there so many circumstances, enabling us to realize some of the best productions of the British muse, as in our old church yard. If the poet, Thomson, had been buried here, Collin's beautiful ode on his death, would have suited the surrounding scenery as well as it suits the

vicinity of Richmond church. Had Gray written his incomparable Elegy here, he would not have wanted but few subjects to have made it what it is; and he might have found interesting substitutes for such as we have not. We have indeed no "ivy-mantled towers," those beautiful monuments of feudal barbarism, but we have ivy-mantled trees, which in the evening of the year, are clothed in colors more splendid than any the poet ever witnessed, in the changing foliage of his own country. These, from the fact that this very splendor is the sure precursor of its own fall, an infallible sign that the gentle hand of death is upon it, are as appropriate subjects of church yard meditations, as any in his poem. It is true, we have no "yew trees shade," but we have our "rugged elms" and many other trees native of our country, whose branches are as thickly interwoven, and who as kindly throw their broad shadows o'er the quiet mansions of the dead, as the cypress or the yew. Our old cemetery contains, in sober truth, the relics of those who cleared the dense forests and tangled brakes of our country, who literally "bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke." We can say of it, without any draft on poetic license, for the sake of embellishment.

"Beneath the sycamore's extended shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

But alas! "Time spoils all things," and trade, which has no poetry in it, has made sad encroachments on the venerable monuments of our Swedish predecessors. The city is fast invading the quietude and retirement of the old

church. Within seven years, some hundred of houses have sprung up on that side of the town. The Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad has pushed its unrelenting way through a part of the graveyard. The beautiful site of the little town of Christianaham, is cut through for the passage of the "rapid car." The very spot where the valiant Governor of the New Netherlands, Peter Stuyvesant of warlike mein and memory, with his sage counsellor Nicatius de Sylle, of the one part, and John Claudii Rising, Governor General of New Sweden, with his commissary Elswyck on the other part, held a parley for the surrender of Fort Christiana, nearly two hundred years ago—that very spot is now a yawning gulph, excavated wide and deep, out of which have been taken thousands of tons of stone, to make the Delaware Breakwater. But what is more censurable than all, as having less excuse, a most magnificent row of trees, which ranged along the eastern boundary of the graveyard, has been sacrificed not to necessity, but to a miserable want of taste. A noble old walnut tree which grew there, and which Old Minuet, the first governor, has many a time gazed upon, measuring seven feet in diameter at its base, flourishing and vigorous, and perfectly sound, was not many years ago, sold for a few dollars, and cut down to be converted into gun stocks "sic transit gloria mundi."

The memory of the scenes and places of earlier life always become more dear to the ingenuous mind, as change and death take away, year by year, those whom we loved and cherished, and leave us connected more and more loosely to the present, as these ties are sundered. Youth full of energy, hope, and trust, looks only forward into the future,

mature age, too often wearied by the disappointments, and troubles of life, and seeking repose, turns its eye backward upon the calm and placid field of early and well spent days, drawing comfort and cheer from their distant and solemn perspective.

About the year 1835, he withdrew from business. Never much engrossed in its active duties, and not at all anxious for its emoluments, he was a full believer in the truth, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." From that date until he was disabled by disease, he spent his time chiefly in literary pursuits, in the congenial society of his family, of the large circle of his relatives and friends here and elsewhere, and in duties connected with the religious society of which he was a member. While keeping aloof from party politics, he felt a warm interest in the general welfare of his country, and his feelings were always enlisted when "the higher law" was involved in a political conflict. This led him to cast his only vote at a Presidential election, in hope that it might help to avert the adoption of the Missouri Compromise; and the principles at issue in the late war made him follow its course with painful interest, and would have induced him to vote for the re-election of Lincoln, but that he was confined to the house by indisposition.

But agitations and excitements of political life possessed no attractions to draw him away from the serene retreats and enjoyments to which he had retired, and where he found a field for the exercise of those qualities of mind, which with an unfailing kindness and cheerfulness diffused a genial and elevating influence wherever he visited. I have already

read an extract from a family record made by Mr. Ferris relative to the character of his ancestors. Basing his own principles upon those which they professed, he exemplified them in the conduct of his daily life, and thus added another to the list of his family, who "dying left no stain behind him." Thus loved by his family, and honored by his friends he lived, until in his 87th year, he composedly and hopefully gave up his spirit to its Great Author.

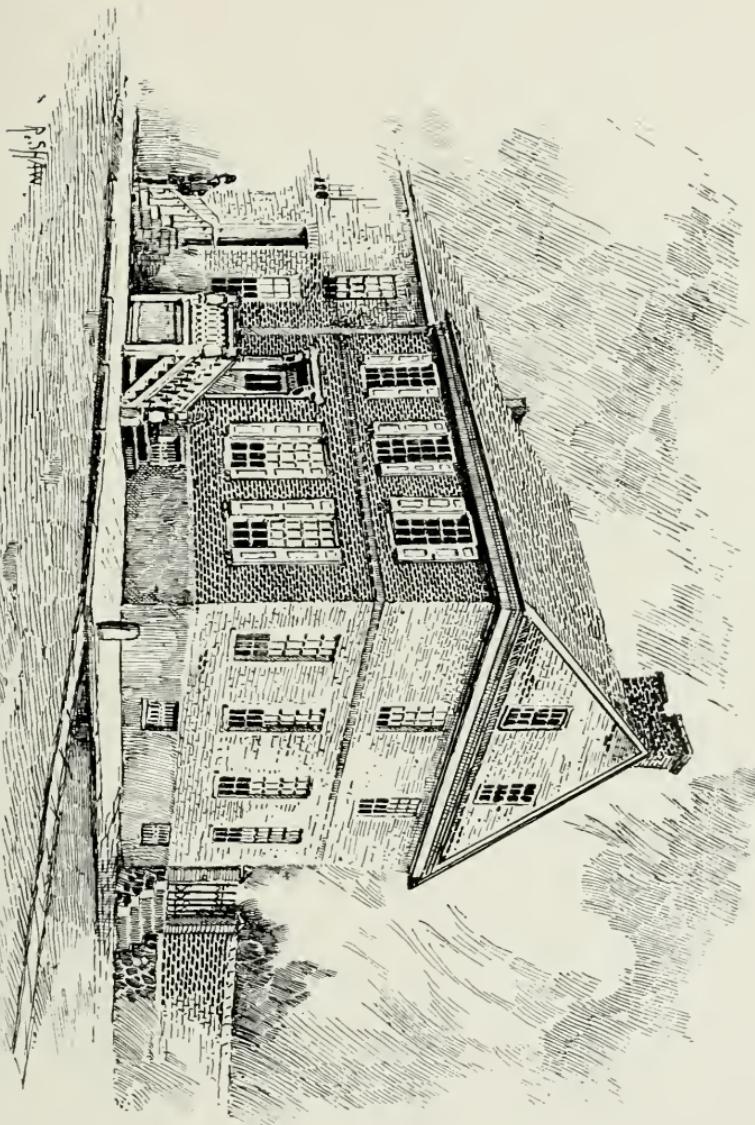
He was a member of the Society of Friends—in that faith he lived,—in it he died—and his last resting place is in their place of sepulture.

REMINISCENCES
OF
BENJAMIN FERRIS.
BY HIS SON, DAVID FERRIS.

In penning these memoirs I am aware that they are records of an humble life, unconnected with military renown, or with titled or noble descent, or with political distinction; "but in the quiet ways of unobtrusive goodness known." My father was born in the house now standing on the N. E. corner of Third and Shipley streets, 8th mo., 7th, 1780; it was built by his father, Ziba Ferris. My father was interested in genealogical research and traced his ancestry back several generations with industry and success.

Samuel Ferris the original emigrant of the Ferris family, (and the one from whom it is supposed all of that name in the United States have descended) came from Reading in England. He settled east from Boston, at Groton. His son Zechariah, settled in New Milford, Conn. Zechariah had eight or nine children; the family were Presbyterian but became dissatisfied with the sterner doctrines of that sect, and eventually joined the Friends (called Quakers). It is remarkable that five of them came to be preachers in the

BIRTHPLACE OF BENJAMIN FERRIS,
N. E. CORNER THIRD AND SHIPLEY STREETS, WILMINGTON, DELAWARE.



society of Friends. Four of the brothers, John, David, Zechariah, and Benjamin moved to Wilmington, David in 1737, John in 1748. The settlement of these four brothers all earnest ministers of Friends in a small town, had a marked effect on the prosperity and moral character of the place. William Shipley, also a Friend of quite large means, invested in property here and settled about the time David Ferris came. From this time the place prospered, many Friends moved in, and their meeting increased. In 1738, their first meeting house was built at Fourth and West Sts.

My father placed the following lines at the head of a Genealogy :

I would not take descent from Royal line,
Could all the wealth of all the world be mine;
Hereditary ills torment the race,
Deep in their robes the stains of vice we trace;
I boast a nobler birth, to me 'tis given
To trace my lineage up from earth to Heaven.

When my father was five or six years old, a friend who was visiting at their home amused the boy by taking him on his knee and showing him a watch; he opened it and let the child see the wheels moving, explaining that they moved the hands so as to indicate the time. That incident caused my father to choose watchmaking as a business. My Grand-father Ziba, deceased, when my father was about 14 years old in 1794; then the question of choosing a trade came up and he earnestly pleaded to learn watchmaking. His school education up to that time was very limited, merely the rudiments, under teachers of very limited capacity and book knowledge.

He was apprenticed to Thomas Parker of Philadelphia, and faithfully served out his time with him and learned all that could be learned of the trade there. He and his fellow apprentice would leave their beds often before daylight and walk three or four miles before breakfast; this early exercise kept them in robust health and preserved them from the evil effects of long confinement at the bench. When father went to Philadelphia, hundreds of French emigrants were arriving in this country. They were often the most highly educated and gifted Frenchmen of noble families; exiled by the Revolution. My father was much interested in them and he wanted to learn their language, but his mother was much shocked at the atrocities of the French revolution then in progress, in France; and used her influence to prevent it. Father's temperament was one to overcome difficulties. Closely confined at his trade, without money and with every obstacle in his way; during his apprenticeship he learned French, and learned it well; learned to speak as well as read it, and some of the Frenchmen told him he had acquired the real Parisian accent. His term of apprenticeship was improved also by the study of history, particularly that of England in which he became very well versed; his memory of dates was so good that he could recall the time of the occurrence of any important event in English history, with the date and duration of the reign of each monarch. All the money he could save was spent in buying books or paying for instruction in useful knowledge. He was a self-made man, and that "spark of nature's fire," of which the poet Burns writes. When his apprenticeship ended he had acquired a fund of useful information; a knowledge of human

nature, and the friendship of some very intelligent men outside of his religious society. Among these were some of the French emigrants I have alluded to. Several eminent among them settled here in Wilmington and vicinity. Irene DuPont, Alexander Garashe, Peter Bauday, among the number. Father was genial and social, he had a conversational gift, and could talk to these French men fluently in their own language, and they had very pleasant social intercourse. Father was married to Fanny Canby, May 17, 1804, he was very fond of children and had a happy faculty of amusing and instructing them.

Many verses of poetry with a good moral; many puzzles and enigmas in rhyme he wrote for us. Many pretty fancy pictures with pen, pencil, and brush, he made for us, some of which are yet extant. I here copy two or three :

TO MY CHILDREN.

AN ALLEGORY.

In a rich verdant meadow, with herbage abounding,
Two sweet little lambs by their mother were fed;
A tall hedge impervious the pasture surrounding,
Secured them from wolves the great object of dread.

You see said their Dam in this meadow gay blooming
How safely we feed ! How delighted we range.
May we ne'er on our strength or our wisdom presuming
Desire to wander, or venture to change.

Yon Forest majestic that waves so inviting
As a dwelling of peace, at this distance appears,
But hear me my lambkins in carnage delighting,
There ranges the dread Wolf, the cause of my fears.

Tho' beyond our enclosure to view all alluring
 The green sloping hills, and gay vallies are spread,
 Yet ah; venture not ! sure 'tis easy enduring,
 The absence of pleasure with safety instead.

So spake a fond mother—a sense of their danger
 Pervaded the breast of each listening lamb—
 They shuddered to think on the fate of the ranger,
 And promised to feed by the side of their dam.

But one of these lambkins its mother unheeding,
 Allured by temptation once ventured to stray,
 A wolf in the woods heard the wanderer bleating,
 Rushed onward voracious and made her his prey.

MORAL.

O'er the limits of truth when presuming we stray,
 And leave the enjoyments of virtue behind,
 How dark is the gloom that envelopes our way;
 Leading downward to death of the dreadfulest kind.

ENIGMA. (Alcohol)

I am altogether Spirit
 And yet I am corporeal
 Tho' found on earth I yet inherit
 A nature quite ethereal
 I physic I have skill
 Yet men of sense reject me
 My bosom friends I kill
 And yet they much respect me.

Benjamin Ferris up to 1820 was very little known in public outside his own religious society;—he took no part in politics, he held no public office, he declined even to vote for a President of the United States because he was Commander-in-Chief of the Army. A simple incident brought him into more general notice in religious circles in and near

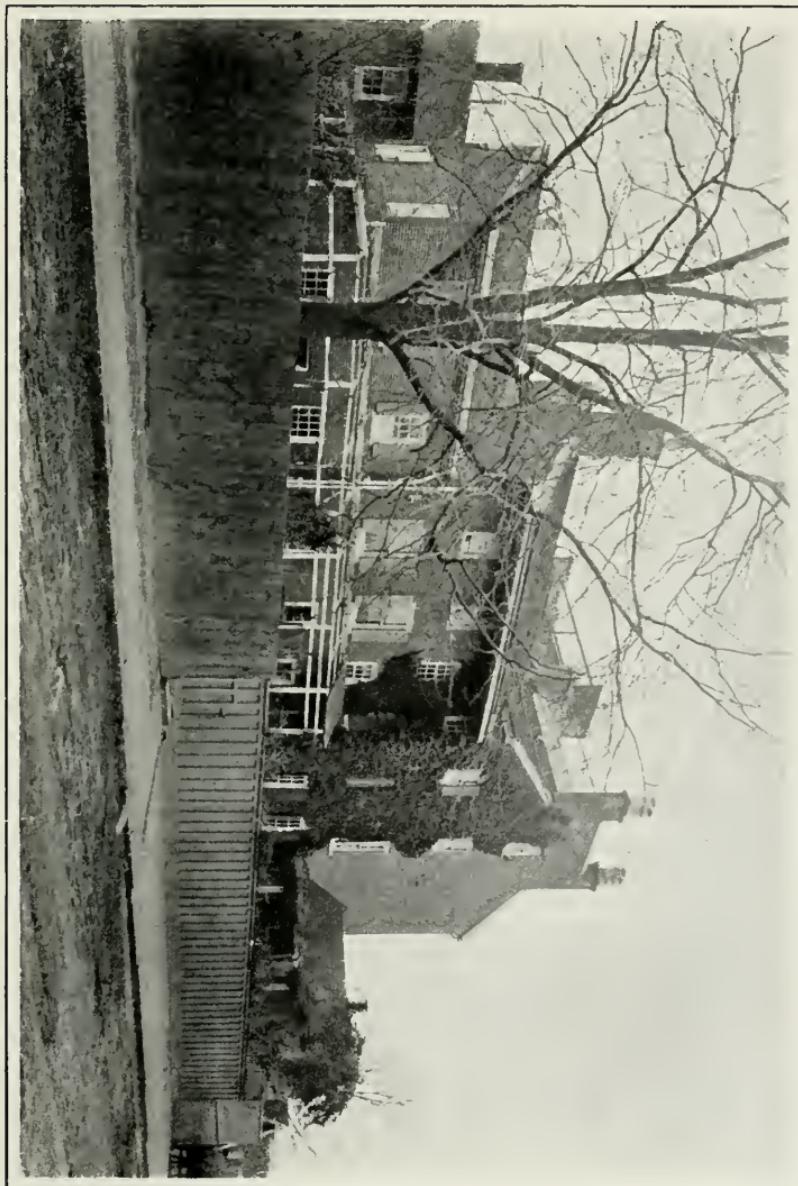
Wilmington. In the 5th mo. 1821, there appeared (in a religious weekly periodical called "The Christian Repository") an anonymous letter over the signature of 'Paul', charging the Society of Friends with holding doctrines inimical to the principles of the Gospel as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. After three of these letters from Paul, one appeared over the signature of Amicus commencing to answer these charges. This doctrinal controversy was kept up weekly almost without interruption until 2nd mo. 1823 with great earnestness, ability and toward the last with some acrimony. It embraced Internal Light, Water Baptism, Lord's Supper, Trinity, Vicarious Atonement, Scriptures, Justification, etc., etc. The public considered the subjects very ably argued on both sides, of course each person giving preference to the side where education and previous conviction inclined them. The contestants grew more uncharitable, and condemnatory as the contest proceeded, as is natural. Each claimed the victory, as is also natural and they seemed to get farther apart in their own views. Paul was Rev. Eliphalet W. Gilbert a Presbyterian Minister a man much beloved by his congregation and respected and honored wherever known. I think he was a good man, and sincerely desirous of enlightening Friends and warning them of their heresy. It may here be noted that in a few years Friends and Presbyterians each divided on doctrinal points. It may be noted that each one of the contestants took the liberal or progressive side in the division of his Society. Gilbert with the New School, Ferris with what is known as the Hicksite branch of Friends. This long correspondence made a great addition to my father's stock of information; in the rudiments of Greek,

Hebrew, and Latin,—in Church History, and the enlightened study of the Bible and of Ancient History. It gave the Christian Repository a larger circulation and its readers much useful information. The literary work of my father best known to the public is his History of the Original Settlements on the Delaware, published in 1846 with a History of Wilmington. Peter Minuit in command of two vessels the 'Key of Calmar and Griffin' landed at the rocks on the Christiana near the Old Swedes' Church early in the Spring of 1638. This was the foundation of the Swedish village of Christina named after the infant daughter of the Great, 'Gustavus Adolphus'.

In 1731 Thomas Willing laid out streets for the town that afterward became Wilmington. It was first called after its founder Thomas Willing, Willing-town. The first house stood at the corner of Front and Market streets and bore the date of 1732. The little town languished for want of settlers and in 1735 it contained only from 15 to 20 houses of every description. The town then began to improve and in 1740 was estimated to contain 600 inhabitants, in 1793 2500, 1830, 7000.

In 1739 a charter was obtained naming it Wilmington, the first vessel for foreign trade was built in 1740, by Wm. Shipley, David Ferris and others named the Wilmington. It is likely about this time the town took this name, 1739.

Father declined watchmaking and removed from Philadelphia to Wilmington in 1813. He had acquired a very plain beautiful business hand writing and adopted Surveying and Conveyancing as a business here. He bought the house where he deceased and in which the family have ever since resided in 1817. Perhaps it may not be out of place to



RESIDENCE OF BENJAMIN FERRIS,
N. W. CORNER THIRD AND WEST STREETS, WILMINGTON, DELAWARE.

read here an extract from a tribute to his memory published in the Friends Intelligencer.

“A rare and gifted spirit has passed from among us, and entered upon the higher life. His wonderful conversational powers adapted themselves with remarkable versatility to all ages and capacities. He was a connecting link between the present generation and the past; his retentive memory and power of representation enabling him from an inexhaustible fund of anecdote and illustration to give life pictures of the character and manners of those who have passed away. He was a beautiful example of the cheerful Christian, and his high gifts employed in the right direction made pleasant and attractive the lessons they conveyed. His able pen was often employed as the earnest advocate of the spirituality of Christian faith. His sympathies were enlisted in behalf of the poor Indians and by advocating their cause with those in authority he was instrumental in redressing their wrongs. But the most impressive lessons gained from his example were in the last twelve years of his life. When suddenly deprived of the powers that had contributed so largely to his own and others' enjoyment, although fully conscious of the loss he bowed in cheerful acquiescence to the Divine Will; and the strong gifted man, laying down strength and gifts entered while on earth into the Heaven of Love. Many can bear witness that however great was the enjoyment of his society in the days of his intellectual power, far greater in these latter days was the charm of the sweetness of his spirit, and the love which seemed to embrace the whole human family:—all those who came within its influence were made to feel ; how blessed

are they who in their evening twilight, are permitted to see the arising of the brightness of the future day. While we deeply feel the absence of one so long loved we must also rejoice that the burden of weakness and weariness has been laid down, and he has entered upon the Heavenly inheritance of joy unspeakable. We cannot close better than by quoting his own words, so applicable to himself:—

Thrice blessed even here tho' in life's lowest station
The Christian who sits at the feet of his Lord.
With joy bears his cross thro' this scene of probation
And patiently waits his eternal reward.

A TRIBUTE TO BENJAMIN FERRIS.

BY PENNOCK PUSEY.

Among the many pleasant recollections of a happy childhood, I readily recall that of two brothers of mature years, who were members of the Society of Friends when I was an attendant at its meetings in my early teens.

With all the hallowed associations of home and the specially gentle and kindly influences which seem veritable exhalations from the peaceful circles of Friends, there was always something in Quakerly decorum and its studied repression of emotional exhibits that was trying at least, if not appalling to the exuberant spirits of average youth and especially to the irruptive propensities of the unmitigated urchin.

Perhaps this was one of the many reasons for the early and ardent admiration I conceived for the brothers Benjamin and Ziba Ferris ; for they differed greatly from the average Friend, at least in outward demeanor by their more demonstrative nature, invariably exhibiting as they did a rare cordiality in their greetings, readiness of expression, and a buoyant and happy suavity of manner which made personal intercourse with them very charming.

Without any lack of the solid merits so much prized and inculcated among Friends these brothers, alike in the Ferris name, their rather short and compact physique, their

tastes, aptitudes and activities and especially in a certain facile and vivacious elegance of deportment in their common intercourse with all conditions of people, evidenced qualities, attributes and peculiarities which are usually accepted as characteristic of the French people. And hence the rather definite tradition and long prevalent conjecture that they were remotely of French origin, their ancestors having fled with the Huguenot refugees who sought protection in England upon the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. While such a family origin seems probable there are no ascertained facts to support it, and their ancestry has been traced no further back than to an English family resident in Reading, Berkshire county, England, whose descendants emigrated first to Massachusetts, thence to Connecticut and finally to Delaware where, in Wilmington, the brothers were born, lived and died.

Benjamin Ferris was an inveterate reader and a diligent student. He early evinced a keen relish for subjects pertaining to colonial settlements in the New World, and he applied himself to historical researches with such faithful and conscientious zeal as realized the best results. It would be difficult indeed to exaggerate the value of his labors in exemplifying the peculiarities, causes and character of the early settlements in the Delaware. He was in the best sense of the term the father of Delaware history; and as the first writer who achieved the task of producing a connected and systematic early history of our state, he placed his fellow citizens and their descendants under a lasting debt of gratitude. In the light of the present facilities for elucidating historic subjects it is difficult to overstate or comprehend the obstacles encountered by Mr. Ferris in the prosecution of

his labors. It should be remembered that at that early period the Dutch and Swedish records had not yet been translated, which necessitated at least a rudimental acquaintance with the languages in which they were written, and that to insure accuracy and completeness of the work it was necessary to hire the services of competent masters of the respective languages, in order to their thorough and satisfactory rendition into the English tongue. It should moreover not be forgotten that the original records were not infrequently of a crude and illiterate character, so disjointed and confused as to demand much hard study, quick sagacity, and skillful arrangement for their easy comprehension. But perhaps not the least discouragement confronting our early historian was his literary isolation, the lack of sympathy with, and appreciation of his difficult task on the part of otherwise kind neighbors and friends.

With the rapidly growing and most recent public interest in historic matters and the very gratifying development of the historic spirit during the past forty years, it can scarcely be believed with what cold indifference the valuable historic volume of Friend Ferris was received by the general public upon its publication in the year 1846. Indeed there seemed at that period and for some years later a petty and almost resentful public feeling which was inclined to censure any departure from strictly utilitarian pursuits in their narrowest sense, and to frown upon every suggestion or movement aiming at any end outside the scope of the clamorous present. The writer speaks advisedly and perhaps with some little feeling upon this point from his experience in originating an attempted movement for marking the first

landing place of the Swedes on the Christiana, less than thirty years ago, which elicited a response of shallow ridicule in lieu of friendly co-operation.

Under all the circumstances the successful issue of Mr. Ferris' History of the Original Settlements on the Delaware was an achievement of which Delawareans may be gratefully proud. It is a history not rendered obsolete by later discoveries, but everywhere still accepted as high authority along historic lines, with fewer and less important errors than were inevitable in the average publications of the time, a volume now so prized that copies are obtainable only with much difficulty and expense.

But Benjamin Ferris was not only a competent historian; he was an indefatigable worker, an able and versatile writer, and a many-sided man of worthy and beneficent aspirations, who faithfully sought the betterment of his fellows, and the social, moral and religious welfare of the general public. While well informed upon scientific matters and profoundly read in general history he was a thorough master of the French language, in which tongue he took pleasure in conversing with the old French residents, of which there was once a goodly number in Wilmington. Mr. Ferris was a man of delicate fancy and rare, quiet wit, gifted with a warm imagination and the enthusiastic temperament of a poet. He wrote graceful verse with rhythmical flow, force and beauty; he indulged a nice capacity for skillful drawing and sketching with playful illustrations, and he left many evidences that he could have excelled in these lighter accomplishments had he chosen to devote his time and efforts thereto. But these were the amusements of his leisure moments, while weightier matters largely connected with

his moral and religious duties as a member of the Society of Friends, occupied his working hours. If, as Carlyle has said, genius is simply a capacity for work, Benjamin Ferris was a man of genius; for his work was constant, varied, unwearied and effective. Alike in his historical labors and as Amicus in his celebrated religious controversy with Paul he exhibited intellectual grasp and charitable breadth of view, while any tendency towards narrow austerity or bitterness, had there been such, would have been checked and tempered by the gentler influences of his liberal and poetic feeling, to say nothing of his religious toleration. In short Benjamin Ferris united in rare decree the capacity for nice detail with the power of broad generalization, to which withal were added at once the modesty and genial attributes that made him a general favorite and courtly grace and quiet dignity marking the finished gentleman.

I shall never forget the prompt and buoyant response he once made to a query of mine, nor the helpful pleasure I derived from it. I had just read with avidity his history of the original settlements on the Delaware, and meeting the author on the street I ventured to express my great gratification with it, and to enquire as to the location of Crane Hook church. I have alluded to the listless reception accorded this historic volume on its first appearance, and perhaps its author was then feeling sadly the lack of general interest in his labors. At all events his face suddenly lighted up at my words, and putting his arm through mine he exclaimed, "I am delighted with so much interest in so young a person ; now come with me, and I'll show thee at once where the ancient church stood," and so conducting me to

the brow of the hill near the corner of Sixth and King streets, from which elevated point there where then fewer tall buildings obstructing the view, he pointed across intervening levels to the majestic old buttonwood on the distant river shore; "There!" he said " touched by the shade of that grand old tree and skirting its long easterly branches stood Crane Hook church; it was erected nearly two hundred years ago, so we may begin to feel that our locality has a past as well as a future."

Preceding and following this information his animated talk was full of stirring and instructive interest, touching the abounding material and rich historic interest of our immediate vicinity, while there was a contagious inspiration in his glowing and earnest manner, from the effects of which I trust I may not yet have wholly recovered.

Two other incidents connected with the memory of Benjamin Ferris, I recall with pleasure both because of their association with a treasured past and because they illustrate the ready tact and wise toleration which were among the pronounced characteristics of our departed friend. One of these pertained to the wedding of the parents of our fellow townsman Howard Pyle, which took place at a private residence, but according to Friend's ceremony, whereat the writer was one of the assistants. Benjamin Ferris was one of the committee of Friends usually appointed by the Meeting to be present on such occasions to insure the due order and nice proprieties they earnestly enjoin. After the ceremony was over, but before the evening was half spent Friend Ferris, casting his eyes about, began to betray signs of uneasiness. His sprightly manners and engaging conver-

sation had greatly contributed to the pleasure of the occasion, but with watchful considerateness he soon conceived the idea that the committee's presence acted as a restraint upon the younger company, and he therefore proposed to the fellow members of the committee that they should all quietly withdraw and leave the young people to their unguarded enjoyment. To this his companions, with some assumption of dignity and claim of the solemn duty devolving upon them, objected, as a tacit invitation to levity and the setting of a bad example. After a brief delay Friend Ferris renewed his proposal for withdrawal which was again declined by his companions. Our friend still persisting, the committee held a brief consultation between themselves, when Benjamin, suddenly turning to the assemblage, exclaimed in his happiest manner, "well young friends we'll make this bargain with you, and then we'll feel safe in trusting you alone:—"do you so behave that we can report well of you and we will do likewise that you can report the same of us,"—whereupon the committee departed amid such a merry burst of applause as left its jolly impetus for the growing joy of the evening.

The other incident referred to I have hesitated to mention, because, being of a purely personal character, it implies at least latent vanity on the writer's part; but it so well exhibits the practical sagacity and kindly tact which marked the character of Benjamin Ferris, that I think it should not be withheld. When quite a young man I was waited on by a committee of Friends, of which Mr. Ferris was a member, in order to deal or consult with me regarding my membership in the Society of Friends. There were two specific charges about which I was to be examined, namely, my

non-attendance at meetings, and the practice of music. At that time I was a radical and aggressive young reformer, an experience which like that of most persons impelled by zeal bordering upon fanaticism, tends to the self-imposition of the world's sins upon one's own shoulders; and so with the presumptuous spirit of youth and scarcely awaiting the committee's opening of the matter I eagerly began the discussion, being glad of the opportunity to assail the Friends for what I thought their many short comings, and especially their lack of zeal in rebuking human slavery and other prevalent crimes. I admitted my non-attendance at meetings which I justified on the plea that I attended as often as the spirit moved me to do so, contending that I thus followed truer Quakerly leading than did those who went merely from force of habit or pursuant to formal regulation.

With reference to music I not only declined expressing regret or excusing myself for the love and cultivation of it, but zealously advocated its pursuit, and, in turn, charged Friends with having mistaken its nature and influence and with gross and culpable prohibition and neglect of not merely an innocent amusement but one of the most beneficent agencies for the good of mankind. The matter having been presented on both sides of the points at issue the discussion grew warm and earnest. But in the animadversions touching my absence from meetings Friend Ferris seemed reluctant to participate, while in those relating to music he was wholly silent. This, as to the latter point, I have always believed was because in his secret heart he really loved music, and with happy prescience anticipated its inevitable spread and the widening and wholesome prevalence to which



BENJAMIN FERRIS,
FROM A SILHOUETTE IN THE POSSESSION
OF THE FAMILY.

it was destined in a progressive civilization. Deprecating the centures persisted in by his fellow committee-men, Benjamin at length, while playfully patting my shoulder, brought the conference to an abrupt close by declaring that "it is just such conscientious and intelligent young people who can thus give reasons for the faith in them, that we wish to retain in our Society; we cannot afford to do without them; and I trust we may all yet see it right for thee to remain with us"—and later he candidly added the confession that if Friends lost touch with the progressive age by the desertion of their young members, there was indeed danger that the Society might retain the shell without the substance of Quakerism and lapse into a lifeless and purely formal body sadly at variance with its inspiring origin and its glorious career.

Time has amply vindicated the prophetic wisdom of Mr. Ferris alike as to his views of growing religious toleration and those regarding the destined growth and refining province of music; and the efforts since made by Friends to correct early mistakes and avert their worst consequences, are seen alike in the establishment of "First-day schools," literary, social and other organizations for interesting their young members, and particularly in their later quiet recognition or at least permitted cultivation, of music as one of the refining and salutary agencies of advancing age.

Such are some of my recollections of Benjamin Ferris. As before stated he was a man of scholarly tastes and graceful attainments. Being a philosopher and thinker rather than an active man of affairs, he never sought popularity; but while averse to prominent action in public and especially

in political matters, he was a man of genuine public spirit and his liberal and enlightened views inured to the public benefit. I am proud and glad to have known him and feel the better for the knowledge, while in common with those who were honored with his personal friendship. I esteem it a privilege to have lived in the same community where resided so genial a friend, so true a gentleman and so wise and good a man.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES OF THE “BENJAMIN FERRIS EVENING.” CONTRIBUTED BY PENNOCK PUSEY.

The meeting of the Historical Society of Delaware, on Monday night, in commemoration of the character and services of the late Benjamin Ferris, the historian, was in so many ways a profitable and delightful occasion that the absence of a stenographic report of the bright sayings improvised thereat is much to be regretted.

Beside the written papers read, brief observations were offered by several of the audience, including Edward Betts, Henry F. Pickels and Elwood Garrett, while longer remarks were made by William Ferris, son of the historian, and by Ezra Fell and William M. Canby. The two last-named gentlemen bore truthful and touching testimonies to the moral worth, kindly attributes and great services of the deceased. Mr. Canby, in particular, in a graceful address, paid a most feeling and felicitous tribute to the virtues of Benjamin Ferris as a scholar, Christian and citizen, whose beneficent influence will long continue to be felt in Wilmington.

But perhaps the audience, if not the best entertained, were most amused with the anecdotes told by William Ferris about his father, among which was one touching upon the well known and very intimate friendship once existing between the Hon. John M. Clayton and Benjamin Ferris, the latter having been a long and ardent admirer of the Delaware statesman.

It seems that a benevolent and wealthy gentleman of Pennsylvania, who had once lived in Wilmington, where he had observed the great number and needs of the colored people, left by will a considerable part of a large fortune to establish some kind of an institution for their benefit, of which bequest Benjamin Ferris was left in charge as executor or trustee. Upon the death of the philanthropist his heirs, craving the whole estate, sought to break the will; but from its perfect regularity they could find no possible grounds for it, and employed John M. Clayton, as the ablest lawyer in the state, to aid them in their difficult and nefarious purpose. After a long and vain search for any real basis for the unjust end sought, Mr. Clayton, by some means, found a couple of old letters which seemed to imply that there had been some kind of correspondence between Benjamin Ferris and William Lloyd Garrison, the noted Boston abolitionist. The letters had no possible connection with the matter at issue, nor bearing upon it.

But it was the counsel's last opportunity and, plying the arts of an unscrupulous lawyer, he took advantage of a strong pro-slavery sentiment then prevalent and drew a harrowing picture of a secret conspiracy forming between Southern slaves and Northern abolitionists for a bloody negro insurrection, in aid of which a secret department of the proposed establishment to be built by the bequest, as he declared, was to be devoted to drilling our colored people and teaching them how to manufacture and use fire arms; and that we would all be in momentary danger of butchery if the will should stand and the institution be established.

The effect of the graphic and lurid consequences predicted by an eloquent tongue to an ignorant and prejudiced

jury, in the old slavery days, may readily be imagined, especially by our older citizens. The will was broken and the charitable purpose of the bequest defeated.

Benjamin Ferris felt unspeakably aggrieved and outraged, and he reproached Mr. Clayton with much feeling for his inexcusable falsehoods and base behavior. The lawyer sought to appease his old friend by declaring that he had not impugned his motives, nor made any personal charges against him. Mr. Ferris replied that the personal effect upon him was of little consequence, but that he had frustrated a noble and generous charity, causing a great loss as well to the whole community as to the people of the unfortunate race who were its special beneficiaries. "And this, too, not by legitimate and sanctioned legal practice," added Mr. Ferris, "which are bad enough, 'but by what thou well knowest to be wicked and atrocious falsehoods. We have been good friends, but I can have no further intercourse with one capable of such baseness.'" And so their long friendship was severed.

It is due to both of these distinguished men to add what the speaker omitted from his remarks, the other evening—i. e. that John M. Clayton afterward sorrowfully declared that he would rather have forfeited double the \$3,000 fee he received in this case than lose the good-will of such a man as Benjamin Ferris.

And now, as further pertinent to the character of the man, it seems fitting to close this supplementary account of the meeting by appending extracts from letters there read, written by two estimable women of our city, the first a relative of Mr. Ferris and the other a venerable acquaintance, whose steady hand and well-expressed thoughts are remarkable in a woman ninety-three years of age.

Speaking of her uncle, the late Benjamin Ferris, the woman first referred to writes, as follows :

" His courtesy and kindness, combined with a sweet graciousness which never left him, made him to me the embodiment of an old-time gentleman. I am sure that must be the general impression of those who were privileged to know him. I can only regret not being able to oblige thee by any contribution better worth the giving. My best wishes for an evening which cannot fail in interest because of a man whom his friends delight to honor. Cordially his friend and thine,

S. S. SMITH."

The second letter is as follows :—

" Dear Friend. I would be glad, if I could, to comply with thy request to contribute some reminiscénces of Benjamin Ferris to the meeting of the Historical Society on the 19th instant, but I was not familiarly acquainted with him, and can recall, I believe, no incident connected with his life, though of course so prominent a figure in Wilmington as he was for so many years could not be entirely unknown to me.

" Personally, he always impressed me as one born into an atmosphere of great refinement and culture, his gentlemanly bearing and fine courtesy of manners never leaving him under any circumstances, and continuing markedly into his old age; and that he was also intellectually cultured, was evidenced by his well-known researches into history, and by other contributions to the press of the day.

Truly thy friend,

M. C. WORRELL."

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